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H I L D A.



"All three were there that summer night;"

Frontispiece.

H I L D A.

A POEM.

BY

HANNAH A. FOSTER.

33
ILLUSTRATED.

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TO
MY MOTHER,
WHOSE ENCOURAGEMENT WAS ITS INSPIRATION,
THIS BOOK
IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED.

H. A. F.

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H I L D A.

P A R T I.

A^{LL} three were there that summer night ;
Sweet Amy, with her eyes of blue,
And fair hair falling soft and light
In curls upon her shoulders white,—
In curls, though none could tell their hue
With sunset glories shining through!

But Hilda had a bolder air ;
She was not beautiful, and yet

In her dark eyes the light was rare,
And when it flashed from ambush there,
On lip, and brow, and locks of jet,
Some nameless charm its bright seal set.

Hilda, the elder of the two,
Was five, and little Amy three ;
They loved the waters broad and blue,
The breath of waves,—the first they drew,
And the stern numbers of the sea
Which mingled with their cradle glee.

Their home was by the ocean-side,
And from the very cottage door

It was the children's earliest pride
To watch the coming of the tide,—
Dashing its white foam on the shore,
Then going out to sea for more

They loved each other, but one day,
While sitting in the cottage shade,
Hilda grew angry in her play,
And rudely snatched a knife away
From Amy's hold; the cruel blade
Blushed crimson for the wound it made!

It healed; but in the dimpled hand,
Whose pretty finger tipped with stain

Caught from the kisses of the sand,
Points yonder to the sunset land,
We read, as in scarred souls, the plain
Life autograph of olden pain.

All three were there, but only two
To note the billows and the skies,
For, nor the boundless seas of blue,
Above, beneath, nor sunset's hue,
Could waken pleasure or surprise
In good old Rover's patient eyes.

From wave to beach the bold breeze skips,
Half folds his wing, as loath to fly

Enchanted ground, and eager sips
Laughter and prattle from sweet lips,
And joy from hearts untaught to sigh,—
The pure glad breath of infancy.

The glowing sun hangs still and low,
Poised o'er his ocean mirror bright;
His haughty brow flames with a glow
Of regal splendor, but they know
How transient, and with child delight
They watch him drop into the night.

For them, cerulean chambers hold
Couches whereon the shadows sleep

The day away, till, from the gold
And purple hangings which enfold
Their slumbers, forth they softly creep
With lullaby for land and deep.

The earliest stars were monitors
Whose voiceless words they understood;
Hark! how the fresh'ning night-wind stirs
The sea-weed! Round the bluff how whirrs
The eagle to her half-fledged brood,
All clamorous for expected food!

"The stars are out, now for a race!"
The little Amy shouts in glee;

Rover responds, with ready grace,
Adapts his speed to suit her pace,
While Hilda answers, fearlessly,
“I’m coming; do not wait for me.”

Lightsome as merry morning bells
The child soon gains the cottage door,
Her simple story simply tells:
“Hilda was seeking pearly shells,—
She lingered longer on the shore;”
Yes, long, for she returned no more.

How the swift-footed tidings sped,
“Hilda is lost!” “Hilda is drowned!”

What eager careful search they led
Along the beach, where fierce waves fed
Upon the little footprints found,
Alas, too near the briny bound!

How up and down, through all the night,
Was heard the dip of willing oars ;
While trembling hands made warm and bright
The fires of home, "because she might
Be drenched and cold!" but what restores
Whom dark seas strand on silent shores?

In at the door the morning came,
Its slow smile with no hope beguiled

The frenzied watcher, whispering blame ;
“ Why did you answer to your name
When angels called ? The way was wild !
’Twas not your mother’s voice, my child ! ”

Day followed dawn, and night the day.
Poor eyes that not a tear could shed
When Hilda’s clothes were put away
Into the past, and Amy lay
After her prayer, unheard, was said,
Alone in her low trundle-bed !

That answered with a far-off gaze
The little one who tried to kiss

Away their look of mute amaze!

Who still with sweet, half-frightened ways,
Stroked the pale cheeks, now that, now this,
And prattled on to ears remiss.

There is no harmony in grief
Where discord by suspension jars;
Where tears, the low notes of relief,
Are not, and grim despair sits chief
Among the singers, and unbars
The madness of malignant stars.

To know what most we hope is joy;
To know what most we fear is pain;

Pleasure may sparkle in alloy,
Sorrow may smite, and not destroy;
Fierce fires may sweep the smiling plain,
And yet green roots of bloom remain.

When love affrighted flees the heart,
And hope and fear stretch equal wing,
'Tis doubt that points with cruel art
Of long delay the deadliest dart;
Slow torture barbs a secret sting,
Which strikes the soul of suffering.

Poor soul at bay! her fixèd eye
Holds the black heavens and burns its way

To the shut doors of destiny,
Which she besieges with the cry
Of awful prayers, that Fate shall say
To her one question, *yea* or *nay*!

Upon the mother's heart the woe
Fell fatefully, and hurried hence
Her gentle life. "Nay, let me go;
The heart is dead that cannot know
Its clear-cut anguish; soul and sense
Distance the milestones of suspense!"

"Poor dear!" the neighbors softly sigh,
And smooth the damp locks from her brow,

And come and go with tearful eye,
And careful step, and meek reply;
“Poor dear!” as in death’s hush they bow,
“Her bruised heart hath healing now.”

The burial; ’tis an hour full fraught
With strange solemnities; no touch
Of sunshine warms, no ray inwrought
With shimmerings of hope, but thought
Weakened by woe, heeds only such
As chills the spirit overmuch.

Into her chamber small and still,
The plain folds on her quiet breast,

With faded lip, and forehead chill,
And step whose noiseless echoes thrill
In anguished hearts doubly distressed,
One enters; peaceful be her rest!

Grief dims o'er-early childhood's sight,
And Amy weeps as ne'er before
When on the lips all cold and white
She kisses "mamma dear good-night!"
And when the last fond look is o'er
They closely shut the sandy door.

O sleep! thou art a blessed boon;
Haste with thy balm for his lone breast

Whose soul is swept by swift simoon
Just as his life is at its noon!
Come restfully and soothe to rest
The birdling of a broken nest.

Softly! whence steals this gracious shower
Of magic healing? Who can tell?
As dews distil on fainting flower
At twilight's benediction hour,
So falls to-night this holy spell,—
The child is sleeping; it is well.

Aye, more; her dreamland life is sweet.
With bright-eyed Hilda, hand-in-hand,

She strays where gladsome waters beat
A sunny shore, while o'er their feet
The light winds toss the golden sand,
Which gleams in beauty on the strand.

So sorrow, in the realm of sleep,
Pre-empta a paradise of joy,
Whose quiet gates the angels keep,
Through which no throbbing sense can creep—
Where life forgets its old annoy,
And rosy weavers find employ.

* * * * *

For Hilda, long the father sighed,
And searched the beach with troubled air,

And questioned the incoming tide ;
But still the sullen deep denied
His tearful claim, and mocked his prayer,
Till hope gave way to long despair.

Round his lone home the autumn breeze
Blew mournfully ; how could he stay
To mend his broken nets for seas
Surcharged with direst destinies ?
So with his pretty child one day
He said " adieu " and sailed away.

" Adieu ! " Away, yet on the deck
Long lingered, till the swelling breeze

Had blown away his little speck
Of island home with all its wreck!
Lingered till lost in angry seas
The coast-line of his Orcades!

Away! the land is broad and free
Toward which his outbound vessel speeds.
America! to thee—to thee
Still may the sons of sorrow flee
From cruel fates, or states, or creeds,—
Still reap as he for worthy deeds.

* * * * *

Years pass; the fisher's cot unkept,
Stands pitifully weak and old;

Its floors the drifting sands have crept,
And through its walls wild winds have swept;
Ceiling and roof sad records hold,
Written in mildew and in mould!

And children sometimes gather near
To tell again the oft-told tale,—
How by the cottage ruins drear,
When twilight deepens, oft they hear
From drowning child a helpless wail,
And Hilda's voice floats on the gale!

But this they speak in whispered tone;
How fishermen have sometimes spied

A shrouded woman, pale and lone,
With tear-stains on her cheek of stone,
And long, white arms extended wide,
Walking the beach at eventide!

Thus year to year renews the tale;
What sounds are heard, what sights are seen;
The shrouded mother, cold and pale,
Roused from her rest by Hilda's wail!
Scorn not their legend, for I ween
Names thus embalmed will long be green.

PART II.

A MERICA! how thrills from shore to shore
Thy mighty pulses, while of them we boast
Who heard her footsteps on thy rugged coast
And to the star-crowned stranger oped the door!

Peerless Columbia! within whose light
Kingdoms cast shadows! Lo, from every land
The heavy-laden haste to kiss the hand
Which wears its blood-bought signet-ring of
right.

Drear was her natal morn, yet to her shrine
Great hearts brought sterling gifts and graces
rare,
Christened her Liberty, and bade her bear
The sceptre Heaven-bestowed, with hand divine.

To-day lurks there no foe within her gates?
Is there no peril in the path she treads?
The wise old nations shake their hoary heads,
In awful oracles pronounce her fate.

The air grows thick as with the mist of
tears,
The sighs of sable millions stir the folds

Of holiest banner, while oppression holds
His scorpion lash aloft; the dark day nears.

The flowery South is fevered with unrest;
From shore to shore unwholesome rumors fly,
Heart questions heart, and eye replies to eye,
The times are troublous, all the land distressed.

Fort Sumter's booming breaks the treacherous
spell;

Forth to fraternal strife, ye sons and sires!
Go feed with bloody hands your altar-fires,
Who dies for truth and liberty dies well.

To arms, ye Northmen! Don your suits of blue,
And for the "dear old flag" brave thickest fight.
Forth from your sunny homes, ye men of
might!

Strike for your "stars and bars" with valor true.

Be brave, O womanhood! Not tears, but cheers,
While drums are beating and they march away;
Wing your pure prayers, "Heaven guard the
blue!" "The gray!"

With weary waiting weep away the years.

Let prattling infancy forsake his toys
To read sad meanings in his mother's eyes;

Let childhood leave his sports, and youth
uprise,

Drum-beats mature to soldiers, beardless boys.

Roll on, ye fateful moons, till crimson rills

Shall swell to rivers deep, and swift, and
strong,

Whose floods shall wash away a nation's
wrong.

Grand destinies are wrought in groaning mills.

* * * * *

"Come in." She did not know the face
Of her own boy, it bore such trace

Of suffering, such a haggard look!
His trembling, wasted hand she took
With prompt, warm welcome.

“It may be
You bring some tidings, sir, for me,
From my son, Arnold?” Fearfully
Throbbled her poor heart.

“Madame,” he said,
“Your son, though wounded, is not dead;
But tattered blouse, and clumsy crutch,
And army life have changed him much.”
His voice grew husky.

“It is clear
You do not know me,—*mother dear!*”

Lethean rapture loving lips
Quaff eagerly, from memory slips
The cruel past, from heart and brain
The shadow, Eden blooms again!

All she has suffered, all her tears,
The anguish of those dreadful years,
All more than cancelled in the joy
Of greeting home her soldier boy.

Sick, weary, wounded, none could tell
His need like "mother," none so well
Bathe the worn, tired feet as she,
Prepare his toast or turn his tea,

Before the fire, in cosiest spot,
She spreads his comfortable cot;
Among her stores the best is sought,
The fleeciast flannels forth are brought,
And softest pillows, snowy white,—
'Tis "mother" makes his bed to-night!
Oh precious ministry which steals
Our heartaches with a hand that heals!
Oh blissful bloom from boughs above,
What is thy name? We *call* thee "love."

That February day was done,
That knew nor morn nor noonday sun;
No golden stairs her cold feet pressed,

No purple chamber of the west
Opened its door and called to rest.
A day, without a twilight blent
With lapsing flush of firmament,
A day, whose cloudiness but grew
Thicker at nightfall, when she threw
A murkier mantle round her form
And stole away into the storm.

Along the quiet country road
The wagon with its cumbrous load
Creaks ruefully; small is the need
Of goading home the hungry steed.

The traveller, as he hurries past,
Shielding his red face from the blast
With huge gloved hand, descries a light
Glimmering amid the gathering night.
The humble farm-house whence it shines,
So shadowed by its lonely pines,
Looks desolate, as rain and sleet
Against the low-browed windows beat;
But, oh, he does not, cannot guess
What overflow of happiness
From hearts within is welling up!
How from God's sweet anointing cup
Down drips the precious oil of joy,
Till in his sleep the soldier boy

Is kingly-crowned; till e'en the head
Which bows beside his silent bed
Is haloed, while pale features wear
The glory of that silvered hair!

Her lips are tremulous with prayer;
"I thank Thee, Father;" faint and few
The words, but worshipful and true;
"Dear Father, merciful and good!"
Forgotten, years of widowhood,
Unheard the elements' rude strife,
So fair, so sweet, so warm, is life!

From broken slumbers waking oft,
Feeling her gentle hand and soft

On his flushed brow, the throbbing brain
Forgets its fever and its pain.

Blest magic! what that aching limb?
Or those long, restless hours to him?

Oh consecrated Pain and Care!
Clasp close your hands; the very air
Is balmier for an hour like this;
Breathe in the long-delayèd bliss;
Hope bursts to-night in real bloom;
There's music in the humble room
Sweeter than spring-time trill of birds;
Only the soul can catch the words

So long unheard, not understood,—

“The Lord is good! The Lord is good!”

When History with honest pen

Records the glorious deeds of men

Who rushed to battle, dared to die

For Liberty, who shall deny

Some little space for those who stood

In weaker ranks? For womanhood

Bivouacking in the dismal damp

Of tears and shadows, till the lamp

Of faith grew dim?

Did she not dare

The very gates of death in prayer?

Did she not carry in her breast
An anguish that forbade her rest?
A tortured heart still true and strong
Though crape was on the doors of song,
And cold white fingers touched the keys,
Waking hope's minor harmonies?

Oh love that ventures! love that waits!
Not as the warrior formulates
The patriot brave "who die or win!"
What hosts were never mustered in!
We measure not by fixed degrees
Your magnitudes and boundaries,

Hearthstones grow immortelles as true,
As meadows wet with crimson dew.

* * * * *

Heroes are men

Who lead to victory; triumphant blades
Rust slowly, though bedewed in battle shades.
The man who wins, is whom fair women sing
With sounding cymbals, "What is one to ten?
The shepherd boy is greater than his king."

Fame hath her mood;

The world is hoarse with plaudits for her chiefs,
But makes no mention in her bronzed briefs,

Of valorous souls, who may not press their
claims!

Of deeds heroic, sunk in seas of blood,
And rubbed out records of immortal names!

With honest aim,
Undazzled by the bright emblazonment
Of epaulets and stars, they early went
To camp and field, pressed to the front like men
In coat of mail; they, whom with glad acclaim
The happy villagers shout home again.

For Peace hath brought
Her doubtful day,—the day which follows strife;

The joy, the woe, which sweetens, sickens life;
A wave of welcome breaks on many a shore
Where wrecks are strewn, a golden bow in-
wrought
With sombre shades stretches the whole land
o'er.

And these are come,—
A few brave boys, who saw their comrades fall
Facing the foe; not one among them all
Fled the red field or shamed the patriot pride
Of worthy sire. Let Fame for such be
dumb;
She adds no lustre to deeds glory-dyed.

Among the crowd
Gathered to welcome them, young Arnold sought
With rapid glances chased by quicker thought,
The one fair face he missed. About him pressed
Neighbors and friends with greetings warm
and loud,
His heart's disquietude by all unguessed.

As when a spray
Of ocean wave is dashed into one's eyes
So that he cannot see the green hills rise,
Though native shores are nigh, so seemed shut
out

Some blissful sight, or near, or far away,
He knew not, blinded by the mists of doubt.

Strange questioning!

Could it have been a dream? or did she stand
One day beside his couch, with her own hand
Arrange the flowers she brought, placing them
where,

Wounded and sick, he could drink in the spring
With breath of early violets and fair?

Was it her smile
That lit his lonely hours with summer cheer?
The music of her tones that charmed his ear

And thrilled his heart? Perchance some girlish
whim

But holds her hidden in the throng, the while
Full many a lesser beauty beams on him.

Not many knew
The gentle girl who stole our hero's heart;
From all the world they chose to dwell apart,—
She and her father,—but when came the strife

For Liberty, they were her friends most true,
Strengthening the hands which battled for her life.

And so it came
That Arnold, "home on furlough," but so long



“ ‘ Because,’ she said,
‘ He was a wounded soldier, and she knew
How brave, how noble were the boys in blue!’ ”

As served to mend his limb and make him strong,

Opened his wondering eyes one day to see

The pretty stranger girl, with cheeks aflame,
Proffering flowers and sweet-toned sympathy!

“Because,” she said,

“He was a wounded soldier, and she knew

How brave, how noble, were the boys in blue!”

’Twas but a kindly courtesy, and yet

New inspiration stirred him. Duty led
Back to the front. ’Mid charge of bayonet,

In deadly fray,

In camp, on picket, o’er and through it all

He seemed to hear her footstep in the hall
Of the old farm-house, and sweet thoughts of
her,

Inwove with hues purpureal war's delay,
And held him still her silent worshipper.

And thus it comes
That Arnold, on this day of war's release,
O'er which are spread the broad white wings of
peace,

With many a hearty hand-shake, smiles, and
tears,

And greetings garnished with encomiums,
Is welcomed home again. His hungry ears

Catch every tone;
For haply one more musical than all
Yet heard, may heedful sense and heart enthrall;
One word from her,—and yet he hears it not.

No tell-tale zephyr whispers how her own
Glad eyes are watching him from yonder cot!

But, one by one,
Home doors swing open for war-weary feet,
And evening's holy quiet soothes the street.
But what of Arnold? Brave he would not be
To own defeat ere battle were begun,—
And none were braver on the field than he.

* * * * *

PART III.

A SCHOOL, quite famous in its day
For teaching in a pleasant way
Things orthodox without an ism,
From parsing to the catechism,
Was the Miss Peters' of Melrose.
The term was drawing to its close
With gusty days which came and went
Too slowly for the discontent
Of rosy pupils, loitering through
The prosy pages of "review;"

Misses in early teens, erratics
In ways polite and mathematics ;
Maidens whose ages one might guess
As eighteen, twenty, more or less ;
The petted beauty much caressed,
The conscious belle, who scorned the best
Of Melrose youths as nothing worth,
Thought school the dullest place on earth,
And the prim Peters, long unmated,
Awfully good, but antiquated !

'Twas just before the holidays,
The season when fantastic fays

Dance on the moonshine of the night,
Stealing its silver threads of light,
Intwisting the enchanting beams
To form the woof of maidens' dreams.
The time when but a smile, a glance,
Is rife with possible romance;
The time when merest commonplaces
Wear dimples in their homely faces,
And quickened pulses well reveal
The spring in duty's clumsy heel!
When castles with their airy towers
Are built in recitation hours,
Furnished, and peopled, while on books
Are riveted most studious looks!

When study hours are sore beset,
And pupils by some chance forget
Their lessons, and the order-line
Dividing day and night at nine!

A tap at number two! Complete
The hush of dainty slippered feet,
And snowy drapery well taught
To check the rustle of its thought.
“Bon ami! heard you not the bell?”
“Ah, is it you? Come in, Adell;
I’m glad to see you—want advice;
The postman brought me something nice

To-night,—a pretty perfumed stray,
A note whose words all slip away
Into such lovely penmanship,—
Just shadowing the sense they skip!
But read, and tell me what you think.”
A pause, in which two cheeks of pink
Grew rosier.

“ Plain enough, I’m sure,
Though slightly, studiously obscure,
A lover! Delicately done;
His very caution proves him one!
Capital, Amy! Do you know
I’ve had them,—half a score or so,—
And ’tis such fun!—but I must go;

I just ran in to ask you where
The lesson is; I wasn't there.
Thanks! Now, my beauty, go to bed,
And don't let lovers turn your head.
Good-night." And gay Adell is gone,
Her spirit than the forest fawn
More lightsome. Amy shuts the door,
And reads her letter o'er and o'er,
And muses smilingly and long.
Of course, in school-girls it was wrong
To break the rules; they both admitted
Their errors, wept, and were acquitted.
And both, for two full days and nights,
Kept study-hours, put out their lights

At nine o'clock, retired demurely;
Henceforth they could be trusted surely.
Dear girls! yet must it be confessed
The yoke of rule so much oppressed
Their buoyancy in rooms recluse,
That when Adell said, "What's the use?"
And bribed the monitress—

Ah, well,

It isn't always best to tell
The faults of others. They no doubt
Had many things to talk about
Beside their books. Each held a share
In other's sorrow, joy, and care,
And glad surprises.

Had he guessed
How Amy's confidante expressed
Its sweets from each exquisite note,—
How every line and word he wrote
Was scanned with merriest critiques,
Methinks that Arnold's very cheeks
Had burned, his very ears had tingled,
Vexation with his love had mingled.

Like caged bird whose golden wings
Beat prison bars with flutterings
For liberty, whose song the while
As trilled from some bright tropic isle

Falls odorous on the charmèd sense,
So, tuned to sweetest recompense,
The soul of Amy, day by day,
Sang weeks of pupilage away—
Breaking its strains to say “farewell”
To boarding-school and “dear Adell.”

* * * * *

The month of brilliancy and tune,
The joyous, sunny month of June
O'er wooded hills had found his way,
Blazed by the blossoms of the May,
Into a vale, whose grassy slopes,
Heavy with breath of purple hopes,

The pretty village close about,
That, all the dusty world shut out,
With air of comfortable ease
Sits 'neath the shelter of the trees,
Where music bursts from every bough
And summer breezes fan her brow,
And purling waters pure and sweet
From summer brooklets bathe her feet.
The perfect dawn had stretched anew
His wondrous canopy of blue,
Dismissed the sleepy stars, and sped
The twilight to his dusky bed;
Thrown back the blinds of groves and bowers,
Looked in the faces of the flowers

To wake them up; all this, and more,
Ere Amy at the open door
Chaperoned for a morning ride
Appeared,—'twas Arnold at her side.
Her peerless form without display
Clad in equestrian suit of gray,
Her jaunty hat, with careless grace,
Saucily shadowing her face
From Arnold's eyes, but not the smile
That wreathes her ruby lips the while
With small gloved hand she culls a flower
Sweet with the incense of the hour,
And, half in coquetry, half jest,
She pins the blossom to his vest.

Leaving the village scarce astir,
Led on by hopeful harbinger,
Across the bridge 'neath which is hung
A swallow's nest of twittering young,
Over the hill, a winding way,
And through the valley silver gray
With morning mists, whose fingers cool
Cling to the rushes beautiful
Which summer in the meadow lands,
Where Nature lays, with holy hands
Soft dripping from baptismal bowl,
Her sacred silence on the soul.

Words are but rude inventions, taught
To trail the duller routes of thought;

Too slow, and cumbersome, to rise
Into the fine affinities
Of rarer regions. There are times
Whose hush the very sense sublimed,
Till sighs unbreathed are clearly heard
By hearts attuned to airs unstirred
In outer courts.

Poor Arnold felt
His utterance into weakness melt
Which he had purposed should be
strong!

“I used to know a little song,
A simple melody, and yet—
All but the chorus I forget.”

"Pray sing it! all these birds and I
Will listen," was the gay reply.

Our hero whistled, cleared his throat,
To which a strange asphyxia clung;
Beginning with a minor note,
The words all tangled on his tongue:

"True as the star which the mariner leads,
Is my love to thee—to thee;
Oh, list thee, my darling, the while it pleads
Sweet answer for me—for me!"

Love sometimes steals into a heart,
Which shuts the door and turns the key;

Nor lets one fluttering sigh depart

Unpledged to sacred secrecy.

Though eye, nor lip, nor tongue confess,

'Twere vain to deem he is not there!

Fond thoughts may spurn the soft address,

But heart pulsations tread on air!

An awkward pause.

“Yon pretty bird

That sings of joy, has never heard

The rapture of one little word!

His happiest harmonies express

No measure of the heart's excess

Of bliss”—

“A mile, or more or less,—
What think you, Arnold,—to that tree?
Be it a goal for you and me;
And fleet indeed must be your steed
To match my Zuby's willing speed!”

The sportive challenge needs must be
Accepted with due courtesy,
Though Arnold's face, for one full minute,
Wore footprints of annoyance in it.
“This interruption is not chance!”
He reads it in her merry glance,
But spurns the luckless thought, and deems
The day not distant when his dreams

Shall shift to glad realities;
When, without mischief in her eyes,
His words of love shall claim her ear,
Which now she has not *seemed* to hear.

Well does the palfrey understand
The language of the gentle hand
Now stroking down the glossy mane,
Now gathering up the loosened rein.
The word is given; away they speed.
The nimble Zuby takes the lead;
A score of unbound curls, and bright,
Are dancing in the morning light

Before his eyes; they must not fly
The near horizon of his sky;
Things beautiful have always wings!
No dust to her white sandals clings,
The starry pathway bends so low
He almost fears that she will go,
Bearing his mortal love to Heaven
Like the lost sister of the seven!
And yet his steed at every bound
Lessens the intervening ground
With steady gains which seem to say,
“Sir Arnold, we shall win the day!”
Until at length the race is done
Which neither lost and neither won.

Just as their rapid course they stayed
To catch the breath of coppice shade,
Where ivy ribbons, smooth and black,
Adventurous growths were binding back,
And low-looped curtains swept the grass,
Swaying to let the light wind pass,
A covert gun, to ill propense,
Burst near and thunderous on the sense!
What wonder both instinctive start?
Surprise may halt the bravest heart!

“Only a sportsman.”

As he spoke

Young Arnold pointed to the smoke

Slow mixing with the woodsey airs
Its murderous breath.

Amy declares
Her terror, but at once descries
The outlines of a new surprise,—
A gypsy camp!

“There’s naught to fear,”
Her lover whispers in her ear;
Thus re-assured, though half afraid,
She scans the seeming ambuscade.

Sleek, shackled horses graze around,
Wagons and plunder strew the ground,

Women and men a fierce array ;
And children, terrible as they,
Approaching nearer, wildly stare
Through matted locks of coarse black hair,
With old, hard faces, dark with grime,
Lettered by cruelty and crime.

A fire was burning in the shade,
And by it stood a gypsy maid ;
A weariness was in her gaze,
And as her brown hands fed the blaze,
Or stirred the strangely savored mess,
A fitful gleam of restlessness

Stole frequent from her downcast eye
On those who watched her curiously.
Ere long another took her place,
When, from her young and sunburnt face
She flung her tresses dark and long,
And gliding from the gypsy throng
Into the denser wood apart,
Losing herself with studied art,
Beneath a venerable tree
Found refuge for sad revery.
The hand on which her haughty brow
Leaned lightly as it scorned to bow,
By locks dishevelled veiled from view,
Seemed to perform a service new.

Beside her wound a little brook,
On which she gazed with varying look ;
Sometimes delight was in her eye,
Sometimes a sigh, she knew not why,
Neither quite uttered nor repressed,
Betrayed an undefined unrest.

As farther in the wood they strayed
The lovers spied the gypsy maid,
Themselves unseen.

A far-off look
Was in the eyes that watched the brook.
To her the babbling of the stream
Wakened the echo of some dream,

So distant that it only came
Low-voiced as a forgotten name!
She caught it, and in tones replete
With melody, so soft, so sweet,
So plaintive sang, the very birds
Listened to catch her tuneful words.

SONG.

“Over the sea—over the sea
Sweet loves are drifting away from me,
Away—away!
Drifting, but whither I do not know,
They broke from their moorings long ago
When the tide was high and the sun was low.

Beautiful loves, floating afar,
Led by the glimmer of fateful star!

“Over the deep—over the deep
Where shadows gather and low winds sweep,
Drift on—drift on!
Oh, the dreary years dig deeper graves
For sweet young loves than coral caves,
With their curtains of blue 'neath briny waves.
Pitiful Past, gather them in,
Shrouded by memories faded and thin.

“Stilly and cold—stilly and cold
Sleep on, oh beautiful loves of old,
Sleep on—sleep on!
While life, with its garnish of summer glare,

Its blasted hopes and promises fair,
Its hearts of sorrow and brows of care,
Wearily waits, treading a shore
Where outbound barges return no more !”

A wingèd zephyr brushed her brow,
And swung aside the maple bough
With curious whisperings, and betrayed
The listening lovers to the maid !
She started ; passion and surprise
Flashed instant from her angry eyes !

“Your pardon, gypsy ! We intrude
Upon your chosen solitude.

Yet please forgive an act so rude;
Your singing was so strangely sweet
It held our hearts and stayed our feet;
Forgive us; though we meant no wrong,
We drank the sweetness of your song
Unbidden: but we'll now away,
Nor pain you with unkind delay."

The gentle tones of Amy fell
Upon her ear with magic spell;
Her eye withdrew its fiery dart,
The words of kindness touched her heart;
A deep blush dyed her swarthy cheek,
Twice she essayed, but failed to speak;

At length,

“It matters not,” she cried;

“Stay if you will, or farther ride,

The forest shade is free and wide.”

“Nay, do not leave us,” Arnold said,

“But tell us of your life instead,

Or rather tell us of our own,

Our future destinies make known.”

“That is an art I seldom try,”

The gypsy murmured in reply;

But further urged,

“Then, lady fair,
Your hand; I’ll read your fortune there.”

So Amy dropped the bridle rein,
Hope’s merry dancers in her brain,
Ungloved her hand with gleeful haste,
Eager her future bliss to taste,
And, smiling, bade the gypsy tell
A fortune that should please her well.

Logic in love, will bend his ear
Predictions sibylline to hear;
Will sun his soul in reflex beams,
And pay a stroller for his dreams!

What indices to love's romance
Are look and tone and circumstance!
Well hath the maiden's cunning read
The story thus interpreted;
So Arnold thinks, and bows assent
To the quick glance those black eyes lent.

She took the dainty hand;

“I see

Strange lines! but one”—then suddenly
She started, by some sign amazed;
Her burning eyes to Amy's raised,
Studied each feature of her face
As there her destiny to trace.



"I see
Strange lines! but one"—

That wild, long look scorched Amy's cheek,
And yet the sibyl did not speak;
Her sealèd lips turned ashen pale,
Her strength seemed suddenly to fail;
Large drops stood on her forehead brown
Where fell the tangled tresses down,
In helpless weakness shook her frame;
So tremulous her grasp became,
That Amy from its keeping slack
Withdrew her hand, but gave it back.

“Speak, gypsy! tell me what you see,
The worst, whatever that may be!

Don't torture me with this suspense ;
Your look of anguish so intense
Bodes coming ill, but let me know
My burden of impending woe."

The words, which to a prayer had grown,
Were answered by a stifled moan ;
With a bewildered gaze she sank
Before them on the brooklet's bank,
And said, in accents low but clear,
"Listen a moment, you shall hear !
My looks you have not read aright,
So, lady, banish your affright,

And ere your fortune I make known
I'll tell you something of my own.

"I was not always what I seem,
But what I was I scarcely know ;
My childhood was a happy gleam,
Unsullied as this crystal stream ;
And something in this brooklet's flow
Links to my childhood long ago !

"I had a home, I know not where,
Only 'twas by the waters blue ;
A mother, who was kind and fair,
With azure eyes and golden hair ;

I never shall forget its hue,—

Lady, methinks she looked like you!

“A sister—such a pretty child!

How free and merry were our plays!

And, though my mood was sometimes wild,

I loved her; she was always mild;

She had a thousand winsome ways,—

Oh, those were happy, happy days!

“I had a father, good and brave,

Though how he looked I cannot tell,

But when his boat was on the wave

My mother's face was often grave,

And as the shadows round us fell,
We watched for him we loved so well.

“Then when he came we gathered near
To kiss him home and climb his knee.
He used to tell us not to fear,
Though waves were high and skies were drear,
For one was with him on the sea
Who walked the waves of Galilee.

“My sister, she had golden hair
Like mother’s, but of lighter hue;
Her curls would float upon the air,
Or cluster on her shoulders fair;

Her eyes were of heaven's brightest blue,
Oh, lady! *Amy* looked like—*you !*"

The gypsy's tone had all along
Been animated, clear, and strong,
But faltered ere she ceased to speak.
She saw the warm flush flee her cheek,
A quick and fearful pallor chase
The very life from *Amy's* face!
A sigh, a faintly fluttering breath,
So lapsing sense makes truce with death!

But Arnold's eye had marked it all,
His arms forbade a farther fall;

The lovely lifeless form he laid
Beside the trembling gypsy maid ;
They bathed her brow, he holding still
The little hand ungloved and chill
Caressingly. Perhaps she heard
Her name,—perhaps a tenderer word ;
Ah, well, o'er her fair features played
A gleam which conscious answer made ;
But as the waves of sunshine pass
Unstayed across the summer grass
Pursued by shadows in their train,
So, from the young girl's 'wildered brain
Reason's glad momentary ray
Faded in emptiness away.

Anon she saw the brave old trees,
Heard through them wing the morning breeze,
But recked nor whom, nor when, nor whence,
First cause nor final consequence.

'Twas Arnold's hand that held her own,
His the low words in tenderest tone
Guiding her thoughts, confused and dim,
Back to the world, herself, and—him.

The gypsy maid was bending near
With throbbing heart and eager ear.

"I dreamed—no, no! it must be true!
Dreams never, never hold in store

Such bliss! Speak, Hilda; it is you,
My sister? Say it, I implore!"

"Amy!" The maid could say no more.

How blest the joy which tears bespeak
When human words are grown too weak!

Arnold, sole witness of the scene,
Failed to maintain a stoic mien,
So far, indeed, that brave or weak,
Stray tears stole down his manly cheek;
He knew it not, all thought, all heart,
That play in which he bore no part.

Hilda was first to turn away,
A terror in her dark eye lay,
The gypsy's signal low but clear
Had fallen on her practised ear;
Up springing like a startled roe,
She made a movement as to go.

"You shall not leave me!" Amy cried.

"Quick, Arnold! We must haste or hide!"

No second bidding waits the youth,
He plans and acts, 'tis well in truth,
For sometimes moments fraught with fate
Knock at the portal—just too late.

Quick to her saddle Amy springs ;
A thousand hopeful, fearful things
Flash the warm life-blood to her cheek ;
She is no longer frail and weak !
The heart which loves has wondrous power
To do and dare in peril's hour !

“ Here, Hilda, quickly ! mount my steed ;
I know his spirit and his speed ;
He'll bear us safely, never fear ;
Once from the wood, the way is clear ;
Ready ? Now closely cling to me
And ‘dare the pass to liberty.’ ”

So saying, forth with cautious tread
Our hero through the thicket led
The homeward flight, nor once forgot
The pride, the peril of the plot,
E'en though he often turned to trace
The soul of Amy in her face.

Emerging from the wood, they turn
Just where the camp-fire fagots burn,
Into the highway.

“Stop!” All hear
The rough command, but Hilda's ear
Notes more; defiant curses chill
Her soul, her very heart stands still!

“She scorns my love; her wretched life
The forfeiture!”

With murderous knife
Drawn, flashing, forth a villain springs,
The while with desperate hold she clings
To Arnold, and away they fly,
Closely pursued, while thought and eye
Measure the distance at each bound
As loud the hurrying hoofs resound!
Increasing hopes wake greater fears,
But when the forest disappears
As down they dash into the vale,
Their fears decline, their hopes prevail,

And well, for surer promise still
Awaits them as they rise the hill;
Their rude pursuers yield the chase
And own them winners in the race.

And now their reckless speed they bate
And settle to a steady gait;
Ere long the village spires are seen,
The children playing on the green,
The cheery markets, shops, and stores,
The dwellings with their open doors
And pretty porches cool and neat,
The people whom they pass and meet,—

Pictures with warm, bright colors rife,
All throbbing with instinctive life.

Before a little low-hung gate
Dismounting, they a moment wait,
Wisely to plan the great surprise,
Softening with slow formalities
To sudden joy the route abrupt,
That rarest sweets be safely supped!
Over the door June roses creep,
And blushing through the lattice peep,
The dewy diamonds evening set
On sheltered sweetness gleaming yet.

Poor Hilda's wandering, wistful gaze
In through the half-closed shutter strays,—
She sees him! In his easy-chair,—
His pleasant face, but silvered hair!
Oh, *now* the daughter's eye can trace
Remembrance in that cherished face.

Softly! we may not rudely press
Into their new-wrought happiness;
They answer to a sacred sign
Who cross that threshold's magic line.
To hungry hearts love's season suits
Slow ripening good, or summer fruits,

Or buds of promise holding all !
Let not one curious shadow fall
Athwart the fair face of their creed,—
“ All tangled pathways homeward lead ” !—
Not ours to question how or whence
The aptitudes of Providence,
Enough, the writing now is read,
The dark dream well interpreted ;
Enough, that love and true content,
The fixed stars in home's firmament,
Above the clouds hold steady light,
Blest stars, which never set in night ;

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Breezes blow inland from the sea ;

O memory,—better than we know

Guarding the coasts of long ago,—

What are a few dark years to thee?

Out-going feet can never stray

Beyond the murmur of bright waves ;

Roses will bloom on far-off graves

After grief's winter wears away.

The air is sweet with immortelles,

Exotics root in sunny sands,

And pebbles dropped from dimpled hands

Intone life's ever-singing shells!

Blest quietude of home and state!

Nestled beneath thy snowy wings

Lone lives forget their wanderings,

And justice seems compassionate.

Love knows his own! a soulful sense

Renders the text which seemed obscure;

Hard lessons to long toil inure

Ere glows the page of recompense.

All colors lose themselves in white;

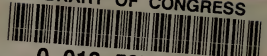
God pencils every shade of chance;

O'er stepping stones of circumstance

He leads the soul into the light.

THE END.

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